

ALEX PADILLA

U.S. SENATOR  CALIFORNIA

The Converting Our Waste Sustainably (COWS) Act of 2023

The “Converting Our Waste Sustainably (COWS) Act” aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air and water quality, and improve soil health through sustainable alternative and pasture-based manure management practices.

Specifically, this legislation would:

- **Establish an Alternative Manure Management Program** to provide grants to help dairy or livestock producers install equipment and infrastructure for pasture-based management; alternative treatment and storage practices; solid separation systems; and scrape technologies.
- **Make composting eligible** under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program.
- **Provide technical assistance and training** to aid in the implementation of eligible manure management and composting measures.
- Prioritize grants for beginning farmers and ranchers, as well as for projects to improve air or water quality near low-income or underserved communities.

As dairy and livestock operations face challenges posed by drought, floods, higher feed costs, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the “COWS Act” will provide a lifeline for the next generation, especially in dairy, which has lost more than half of its licensed operations since 2003.

This voluntary program will support producers as they shift towards manure handling systems that provide environmental and economic benefits including:

- Reduced methane emissions and improved air quality through reductions in ammonia and nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions;
- Water quality improvements through dry manure handling;
- Water savings due to the elimination or reduction in flushing manure from barns;
- Production of compost, a beneficial product that can substitute for expensive inputs such as bedding and mulch and generate an effective alternative to costly synthetic fertilizers.

The COWS Act fills an important gap in the farm conservation toolbox by supporting manure management practices that work on farms of all sizes, reduce methane and NOx, and help boost the profitability of the dairy and livestock sector.

Endorsed by California Dairies, California Dairy Campaign, Environmental Working Group, National Farmers Union, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and the National Milk Producers Federation.

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What they're saying about the COWS Act:

“Dairy farmers are critical to our efforts to address the climate crisis,” said **Scott Faber, Senior Vice President for the Environmental Working Group**. “The COWS Act will make proven, climate-smart practices a bigger priority for USDA. We applaud efforts to help our farmers reduce greenhouse emissions by investing in climate-smart practices. Our farmers are already seeing the effects of climate change firsthand and are eager to be a big part of the climate solution.”

“The COWS Act will provide crucial nutrient management resources to dairy farmers, who are currently struggling because milk prices fall well below their production costs. Passage of the COWS Act will enable dairy farmers to adopt practical climate-smart nutrient management methods that improve air and water quality and achieve their environmental sustainability goals.” said **Lynne McBride, Executive Director at the California Dairy Campaign**.

“Sustainable manure management is a critical conservation priority for dairy farmers as the industry works to achieve its voluntary, producer-led goal of becoming greenhouse gas neutral or better by 2050. However, conservation programs continue to be oversubscribed, preventing dairy from making its greatest possible contribution to the nation’s greenhouse gas reduction. We thank Reps. Jim Costa, D-CA, David Valadao, R-CA, and Chellie Pingree, D-ME and Sens. Alex Padilla, D-CA, and Sherrod Brown, D-OH, for introducing the bipartisan, bicameral COWS Act which will elevate the emphasis on a variety of manure management systems important to dairy’s stewardship priorities.” said **Paul Bleiberg, Senior Vice President of Government Relations at the National Milk Producers Federation**.

Dairy farmers are working to implement climate-smart manure management practices, and the COWS Act will offer the needed resources to enhance both air and water quality. The COWS’ Act manure management practices will lower methane emissions, providing practical solutions that dairy farmers are eager to adopt in their efforts towards becoming more sustainable. **Rob Larew, National Farmers Union President**

“In today’s retail market many consumers and brands are increasingly looking for dairy food products with climate friendly origins. This bill helps dairy farmers cost-share technologies, facilities and practices to retrofit farms to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. For a lot of the farmers I work with, which are small to mid-sized, methane digesters just do not make practical or economic sense, so legislation that offers more options farmers can use to manage the animal manure we need for growing crops is a great idea.” **Scott Stoller, Organic Valley Board member and dairy farmer from Sterling, Ohio**.